

Letter from Mabel Hubbard Bell to Alexander Graham Bell, March 14, 1892, with transcript

Letter from Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell to Dr. Alexander Graham Bell. Florence, March 14th, 1892. My darling Alec:

I hope you will understand my cable this morning. "Think McCurdy better return, your need greatest." I think it unusually clear and intelligible, for me. I confess I would rather like him to stay, I do dread the voyage home. I am afraid it will be awfully rough, visions of icebergs and fogs, and mutinous sailors rise before me. I almost wish I hadn't sent that cable, I will only think of you, you poor fellow facing the music of a most dastardly charge all alone without the love and sympathy of your wife and daughters to make you strong to regard the vile calumny as it deserves. I wish Mr. McCurdy were a woman that I might leave him in charge of my children and go home myself. I think this is about the first time I have wished such a thing, for I certainly couldn't stand a woman secretary in the house. How are you getting on all alone, what are you doing about your washing and your mending and a thousand other little things you have never had to think about. Who will take care of you? I wonder shall I hear before I see you. I propose to leave here on the 23rd and reach Paris on or before the 30th having stopped at Venice a few days, and to sail on the 16th in La Touraine unless I hear from you and Papa to the contrary. If I did not feel that Mamma ought to come on account of her eyes, I would hope that she would decide not to, for I am homesick for you — Alec dear.

I spent all day yesterday in luxurious idleness on the sofa, it was Sunday, and you did not succeed — in Rome. Today is warm, and although it is storming at intervals I have sent for the carriage and am going for a drive in an open landau in the country. I have waited ever since coming here for a fine afternoon for my drive, and as it has been in vain so far, I won't wait any longer. Only it is getting late.

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Tuesday — Not having anything to say I left off and waited for the carriage, which never came, Charles not having understood my order to get it. It is coming this afternoon sure, and we have a far more promising day. I only hope it will continue promising until after our drive, it is not very sure at its best. Yesterday was the King's birthday, but the parade was postponed on account of the weather, we are hoping that we shall see it this afternoon, but I won't delay sending this any longer.

Your answer to my cable was handed me this morning when my blinds were opened. My dear, if you had spent years you could not have connected a more unsatisfactory and aggravating reply—"Want McCurdy if you do not" — Well but I do, what then. Is your need greater than mine or is it not, that is what I want to know. Have you really got pressing work on hand for your secretary, or can you wait until we return. Of course you can nearly always find something for Mr. McCurdy to do, but have you anything on hand which demands his attention. Are you obliged to employ another secretary while he is "galivanting" over here? In such cases as these the cable is nothing but an aggravation. I have employed it many times and never get any satisfaction when attempting to go beyond a mere exchange of civil inquiries for ones health. Oh dear if the voyage is a pleasant, smooth one I shall get along all right without 3 Mr. McCurdy or any one else, but in a storm I lay awake all night during the only storm we had coming over, and how black and huge those waves were and how they did dash up and how the big ship went down, down and I held my breath and wondered if she would ever come up again. And then the fogs and icebergs hidden in it. Instead of saying "if you do not" why didn't you say "if you don't, well." That would have given me a piece of information which would pay for my money and not cost any more, now I have no information whatever, and I want to know how you are.

Sophie has sent me an advertisement of a governess here in Florence and I am going to see her, she describes herself as a Swiss clergyman's daughter, speaking German, Italian and French knowing music and needlework.

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My cousin Lily Gillette died yesterday at San Remo of consumption. She is Cousin Annie McCurdy's sister and Papa's own niece and my own first cousin, although you have never seen her, and I not since I was a little child, still she was my own cousin, and I sent Augusta a cheque for fifty dollars to use for her benefit as she thought best. She wrote that she would use it without the knowledge of the remaining two sisters as it might wound their pride. But I had another letter today saying that she found them worrying so much about the doctor's bill that she told them. She says further that their necessary immediate expenses for funeral etc., may be so great that they may be glad to accept my further offer to advance them money until their remittances arrive. I hope you will think I have done right. They are all alone here, and I am their nearest relative within reach after Augusta. I can draw upon Bell and Co. 4 if I need any more funds, as I find that the Bankers honored my drafts on your cheque without waiting for three weeks as you thought they might. But I think I shall come out all right. My passage will be 2700 frs. all paid, and my expenses to Paris via Venice under 1000 frs., and I have calculated my board expenses at 600 frs. a week which is what I paid in Genoa and at the hotel here, or rather more and at this will leave me five thousand francs for dresses etc. for the children and myself. You see I do some arithmetic when I am cast on my own resources. I am going to have two cabins, so as to accomodate the governess, and will not therefore take a chambre de luxe as I would if both children were in the room with me.

Goodbye now, take care of yourself, Always yours, Mabel.